

The Odyssey Panorama

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Exhibition Statement

The Odyssey Panorama drawing series featured in this exhibition is a window into a fictional dimension that offers a record of a futuristic community's adaptation and improvisational response to 21st century industrial debris, the forces of nature and the passage of time. *The Odyssey Panorama* depicts a post-apocalyptic fantasy realm made possible by an improbable union between, art, architecture, design, illustration, and conceptual engineering. Through the use of computer-generated drawing and printing technology this world unfolds visually in chronological installments through static, cross sectional profiles, and flattened outlined planes of solid colour. It is a peculiar parallel universe populated by inhabitants that combine innovative, survivalist modes of living with ecologically sound principles. With its highly saturated colour palette and vast blue skies it's an optimistic looking future that alludes to social harmony with an emphasis on sustainability. The drawings function like a proposal that demonstrates what re-purposed infrastructure and provisional architecture could look like if it were to be combined and re-presented in the form of an aesthetically pleasing human built environment. Far from being dark and violent this fictional society is maintained by Day-Glo and animal skin attired horticulturalists that collaborate to build sustainable communities that are simultaneously sensible and whimsical.

The collaborative process that existed between Peter Cook, David Green, Michael Webb, Warren Chalk, Dennis Crompton, and Ron Herron of the

Archigram Group during the early 1960s led to the production of many examples of hybrid forms of art and architecture. The common ground that informed much of their work related to the problem of modernist architecture's inability to provide form to the realm of the temporal and spaces of intangible events.¹ For the members of Archigram, architecture needed to co-exist with and embrace the spirit and material reality of the times that included science fiction, automation, manufactured disposable products, television, and household appliances.² The present and future built environments required user friendly, disposable, collapsible, inflatable and relocatable material components and kits that rational, machine inspired modernist architecture was incapable of producing.³

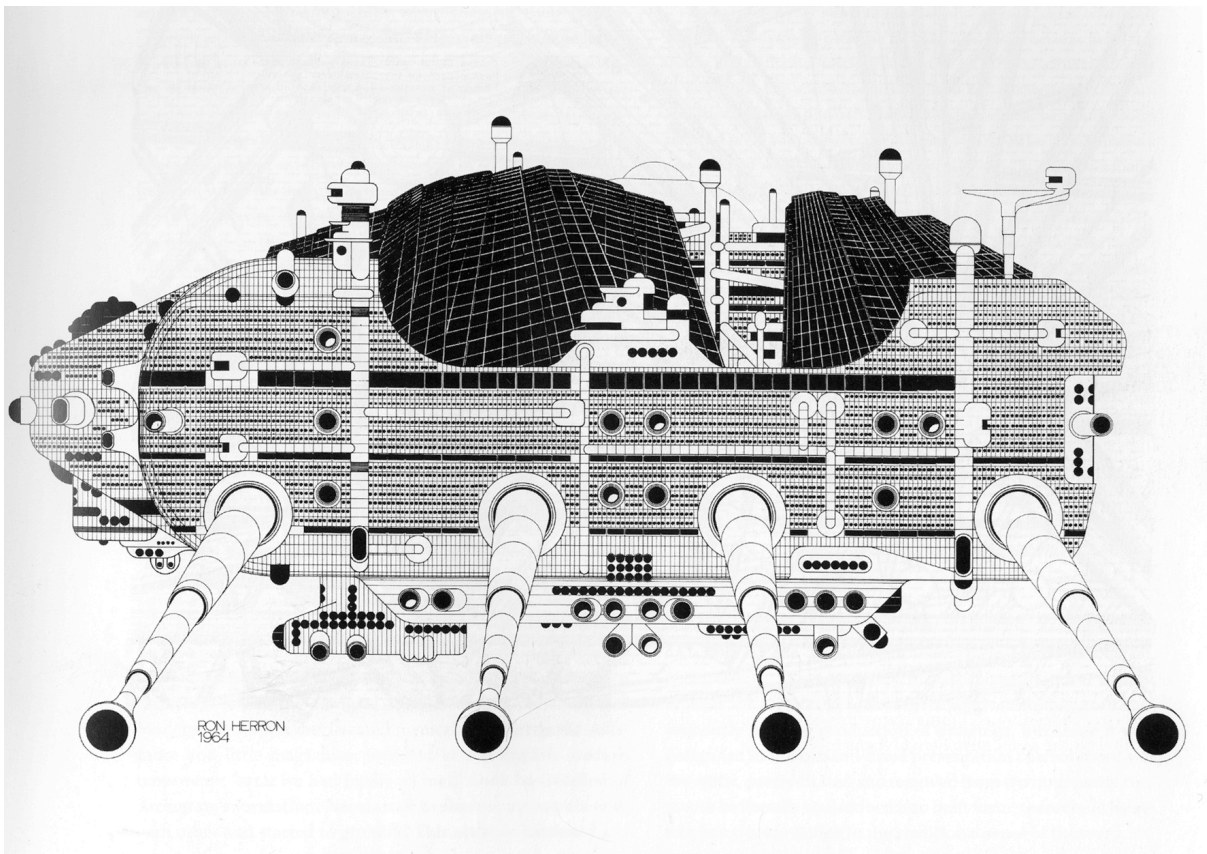


Figure 1: Ron Herron, *Walking City*.

In my own interdisciplinary practice, I am interested in utilizing the symbolic power of architecture and have been fascinated with Archigram's radical plans and proposals, i.e.: their conceptual architecture projects created to exist as ideas alone. Archigram member Ron Herron's *Walking City* is an artwork but looks like a technical drawing or blue print, blurring the boundary between art and architecture (figure 1). The massive structure has mobile living pods that hang from its giant inverted A-frame armature. The personal living pod could be purchased and discarded as easy as any other commodity; it was architecture that functioned as a consumer product.⁴ Herron's *Walking City* was a proposal for a mobile city that engaged with relevant social discourse that incorporated the perceived needs and desires of contemporary British citizens.⁵

Herron incorporated utilitarian details like ventilation shafts into the drawings creating a dialogue between the real and the unreal. In my own independent and collaborative work with art and architectural hybrids, I have come to realize that specific practical and technical details matter. In an effort to maintain a kind of authenticity, I approach fantasy with the same logic, making sure that features like rain gutter and irrigation systems, chimneys and door knobs are included to enhance the believability of the imaginary. In an attempt to create a feeling of accessibility, and functionality or utility to the fictional work, human figures are pictured living, working and playing in these constructed utopias. The people are depicted as dressed in fashionable clothing appropriate for weather conditions, and are either at work building or repairing their homes or

engaged in some other ambiguous collective activity. Figures can best demonstrate scale relationships and help viewers understand and imagine how they might personally interact with the fantasy landscape, shelter and otherworldly sustainable energy technologies that have been pushed into practical architectural service.



Archigram's drawings also push technology into architectural service and are imbued with the understanding that technology will provide emancipation to humankind from their enslavement to conventional forms of architecture, and freedom to have creative control over their environment.⁶ Modernist architecture had become increasingly far removed from what Archigram

Figure 2: Warren Chalk, *Archigram* no. 6.

perceived to be emerging societal demands that called for “interchangeability, mutability, and elasticity.”⁷ *Walking City* had the capability to incorporate responsive architectural characteristics and could adapt to change and even escape from its environment. It was what Simon Sadler refers to in *Architecture Without Architecture* as Archigrams’ “mythic heroism.”⁸

The Archigram name stemmed from combining architecture with the word, idea, and the function of the telegram, i.e.: an electronically transmitted and coded message translated and delivered in printed form. Between 1961 and 1970 Archigram (who themselves were students or recent art/architecture school graduates) self-published and produced nine issues of their own magazine entitled, *Archigram*.⁹ In contrast to professional architecture journals and publications, the *Archigram* issues resembled the self-published “zines” emerging from the do-it-yourself music and youth culture scene. In the spirit of subverting architecture and opening up its accessibility, the magazine featured collages, drawings, plans, critical essays, comic book style illustrations and captions (figure 2). The Pop Art inspired zine format symbolically broke down the distinction between high and low culture, appealed to a student audience and challenged its readers to think about what architecture could look like regardless of its plausibility or the prescriptions of its professional conventions.

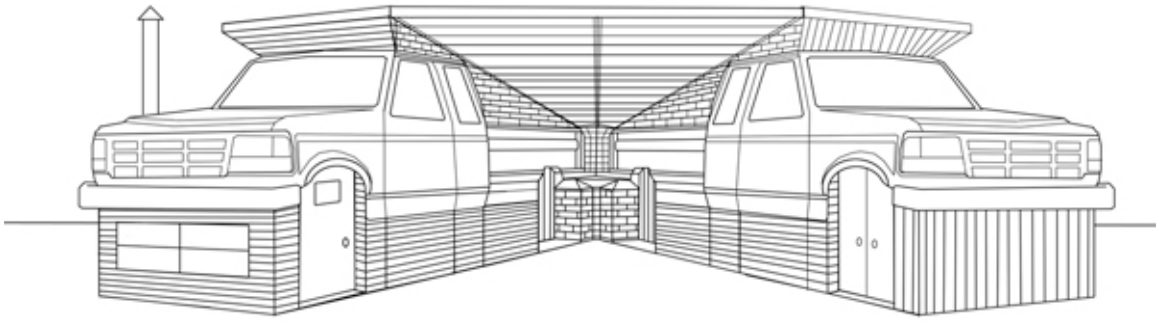


Figure 3: T&T, *Carchitecture*.

The Archigram zines inspired Tony Romano and myself, collaboratively working under the name T&T, to self-publish a limited edition colouring book (figure 3) and mini-magazine (figure 6) called *Carchitecture*. We produced these book works in our third year as undergraduate students at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 2000. The books depicted, through simple black and white line drawings, the unlikely architectural union between automobiles and small-scale timber framed sheds. The inexpensive photocopied paper format allowed us to give them away or sell them cheaply. Taking our cue from Archigram, we merged the visual language of architecture and design with fantasy as a way to express our serious concerns for the environment.

The Canadian artist Kim Adams also blurs the boundaries between art, popular culture and architectural environments. What interests me about Adams is the way in which he achieves a complex hybrid of disparate three-dimensional forms and culturally charged sources through mixing time periods, history, play, and parody. He gives new purpose to old and new materials by reinventing everyday social circumstances using prefabricated parts gleaned from

automobile manufacturing, home improvement and hobby craft model-making culture. Adams' materials transgress proscribed uses and conventions by pushing the limits of scale, function and context. By resituating the stuff of theme parks, wrecking yards, show rooms, department stores, backyard tool sheds, basement projects and obscure convention halls into the public art gallery exhibition space, Adams challenges our sense of familiarity by creating binary interplays between participant/viewer, gigantic/miniature, and child/adult.

Adams was a subject of an interview with Robert Enright conducted in 1999 in conjunction with "Reverse Function" symposium on art and architecture at Plug In Gallery Winnipeg. In it, Adams reveals how as a direct result of an experience from his youth, temporarily living in a caravan and shack in Australia, he has a creative impulse to build things with greater attention to their functional nature than to their aesthetic.¹⁰ Nevertheless he still manages to achieve the aesthetic in his work. Considering his autobiographical history, it makes sense that Adams creates decoy houses made of tractor-trailer sleeper cabs and artist residencies made from boxcars. It also helps us understand the significance behind his use of a utilitarian, multipurpose, Volkswagen camper van, as an alternative vitrine for his critically acclaimed installation, *Bruegel-Bosch Bus* (figure 4).



Figure 4: Kim Adams, *Bruegel-Bosch Bus*.

The *Bruegel-Bosch Bus* that Adams built between 1996 and 2002 is a good example of mixed media work that resides somewhere between museum diorama, architectural garden pavilion and sculpture. The van appears to have mutated into a miniature fictional metropolis/amusement park. It is a dreamlike, multi-layered, mountainous tableaux of popular culture and urban chaos that resembles a nightmarish, post-apocalyptic landscape. The immobilized Volkswagen van with its topiary-like super hero action figure adorned shell is a self-contained spectacle designed to transport the viewer into a dysfunctional and frightening Disneyesque fantasy and place of unquiet contemplation. Adams opens interior views into the core of the van with strategically placed gaps and sight lines, directing how we see and interact with the highly detailed, modified scale model buildings and figurines posed to depict scenes reminiscent of contemporary life. I find that the play between mobility and immobility evident in

Bruegel-Bosch Bus relates to a sense of restlessness and readiness for potential relocation. Although immobilized and propped up on tire jacks, the van's wheels are intact, leaving one to imagine Adams packing it up and driving away.



Figure 5: T&T, *Carchitecture*.

Over the past ten years, the collaborative work I have produced with Tony Romano has included mixed media based installation that makes use of modified vehicle parts and custom built shed-like shelters. When represented in miniature (through diagrammatic drawings and small maquettes), we place our car shelters in isolation within sections of brilliant green grass or in snow covered tree groves (figure 5). Like Adams, we build both in miniature and in full scale (figures 8, 9, and 10), but unlike him we do not mix the two worlds. We keep the scale consistent in order to push the idea of the illusion towards some sense of

verisimilitude. Like Nils Norman, we are interested in the idea of moving fantasy into the space normally occupied by instructional manuals, architectural blue prints and plans (figure 6).

Nils Norman is a London, England based visual artist who makes art out of conceptual architecture and utopian proposals for town planning. Much of Norman's work appropriates the visual language or presentation methods of urban planners and developers. By adopting a strategy of a deception, his decoy scale models, maps, and renderings present viewers with idealized utopian proposals. The most intriguing aspect of this work is the illusion that the proposals have been conceived of and approved by professional design committees and drafted by actual planners or architects. To the unsuspecting

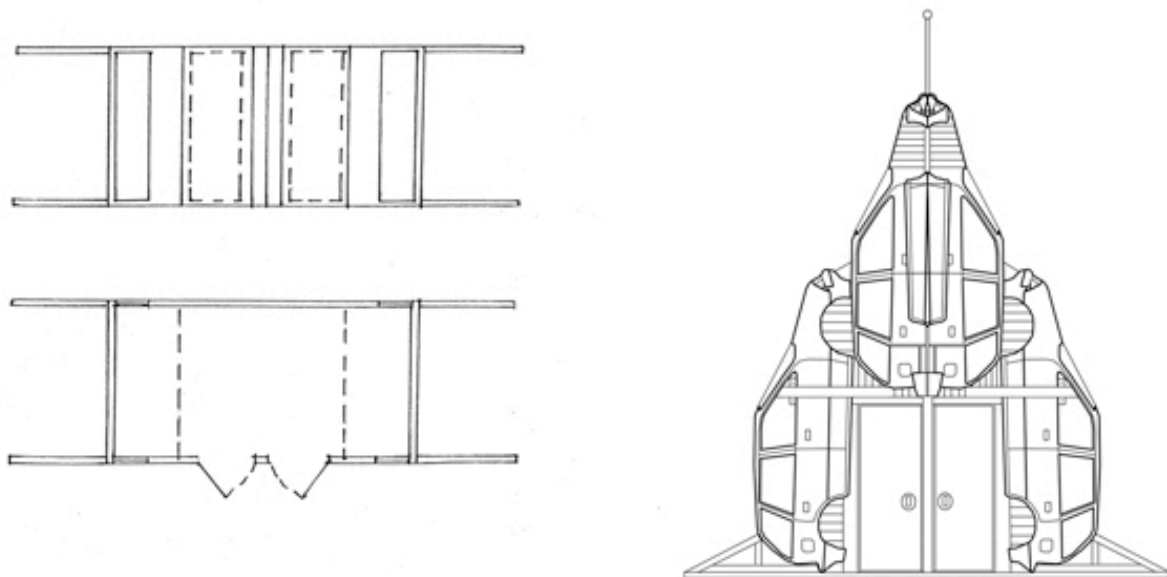


Figure 6: T&T, *Sanctuary*.

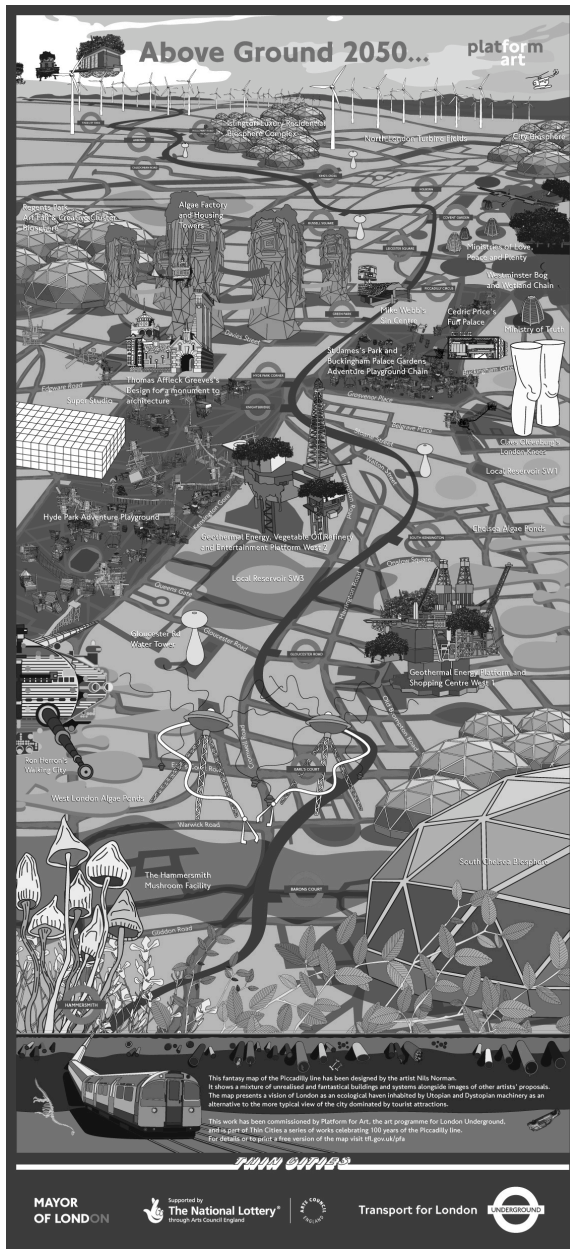


Figure 7: Nils Norman, *Fantasy Piccadilly Line*.

tourist destination maps in the London Underground, depicting “a series of unrealized and fantastical buildings and systems alongside other artists’ unrealized proposals for London.”¹¹ On the maps, Norman designated ecologically sound utopian architecture in place of familiar tourist hot spots. Norman, in the creation of his map, included the work of five other artists, among

viewer, the effect would likely be disarming and perhaps even amusing. Instead of shrugging off a speculative artistic conception, the public is tempted to seriously consider how a utopian proposal may impact their communities and cities. Norman’s undercover intervention also has the potential to engage the interest of professional planners and architects.

In 2007, Norman was commissioned by Transport London to produce a map for the Piccadilly Underground station, its trains, and street furniture in commemoration of its centennial (figure 7). His piece, titled

Fantasy Piccadilly Line, replaced actual

them two Archigram members: Michael Webb (*Sin Centre*) and Ron Herron (*Walking City*).¹² Examples of fantastical systems in *Fantasy Piccadilly Line* include turbine fields, algae factories, bogs and wetland chains, geothermal energy platforms, water towers, and geodesic biosphere complexes.

Norman's Piccadilly map project with its bold cartoon renderings is rich with irony. The map project proposal's inability to convey a sense of earnestness seems appropriate when we consider in hindsight how naïve 1960s revolutionary architectural utopian plans seemed. In relation to my own work, I struggle with the problem of representing the future without cynicism even as I try to achieve that suspension of disbelief in the viewers of my work.



Figure 8: T&T, *False Creek Squatter's Raft*.



Figure 9: T&T, *everything's gonna be ok.*



Figure 10: T&T, *everything's gonna be ok.*

Tony Romano and I became aware of Archigram in 1999 while we were students working towards our undergraduate degrees at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver. When we first saw Ron Herron's *Walking City*, we became excited about the prospect of creating our own brand of utopian architecture aligned with social change. We recognize the opportunity to propose our own futurist vision and ideas, and to see how they would compare to the work of our predecessors. Why could not futuristic conceptual architecture be a potential platform on which for us to base drawings and sculpture in the year 2000 and forward? Why could we not use this form of art to challenge the social conventions in regards to resource consumption? How could this be a vehicle to suggest the potential dire outcomes that would precipitate humanities need to be inventive, ingenious and far more prudent in the use of the resources at hand? I was soon to discover that the collaborative work that I was beginning and this style of art would prove to be a recipe for great creativity and expression of my deeply held convictions.

Improvisation and collaboration connect the inner world of *The Odyssey Panorama* drawings (figures 11, 12, 13, and 14) with the actual practice of producing the work digitally. Unlike various conventional drawing techniques, changes and edits to digital drawings can be made quickly, which easily enables the creation of many versions and layers of the same image. My ability to manipulate my medium and easily merge previously drawn disparate objects, like cars and trees, often leads me to investigate further elaborations and variations

that produce previously unthought of results. This versatility and sense of freedom promotes a sense of risk free experimentation that often leads to an inquisitiveness that motivates me to push the limits of representation.

These factors all come into play in my collaboration with Tony Romano. One of us may begin a drawing, for example, which is then offered to the other for their creative revision. In the case of our installations, Tony may work with the dismantling and reassembling of the automotive parts, while I construct and configure the wooden elements. I have found that through abandoning independence and personal control over the outcome of images in favor of co-creation leads to the production of an almost infinite variety of unexpected results, forms, and associative meanings. Our complimentary aesthetic sensibilities, sense of playfulness and humour combine our shared interest in graphically representing and building prototypes for sustainable architecture and enable us to work together toward similar ends. The results of our collaborations, which constantly and invariably feed back into my independent art practice, has influenced my process, and has created exciting new ideas and possibilities relating to hybridized forms of art and architecture explored in both this exhibition and accompanying paper.

Although imbued with a good measure of humour and implied optimism, *The Odyssey Panorama* resembles a familiar Hollywood science fiction, a *Mad Max* kind of world, where survivors of an apocalyptic event recycle the cast-off remnants of industrialization and prepare for an uncertain future. Technology in

The Odyssey Panorama is apparent, but simplified and reduced to a personal scale in the form of renewable energy systems. My hope is that representation of solar panels, wind turbines, waterwheels, and geodesic domes will play a role in the development of a meme for ecology. By suggesting that the products of unsustainable systems be used to construct inhabitable sculptures, that is architectural art, this exhibition proposes a shift in thinking from the standpoint of the preservation and maintenance of the ecological, economic and technological status quo to the survivalist approach of preparing for an inevitable and unstoppable change.

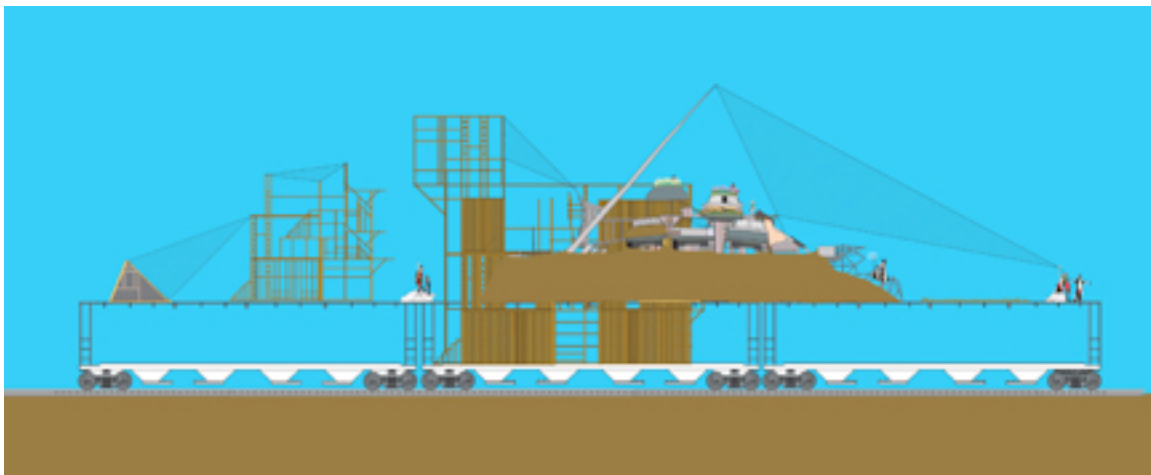


Figure: 11: Tyler Brett, *The Odyssey Panorama*.



Figure 12: Tyler Brett, *The Odyssey Panorama*.

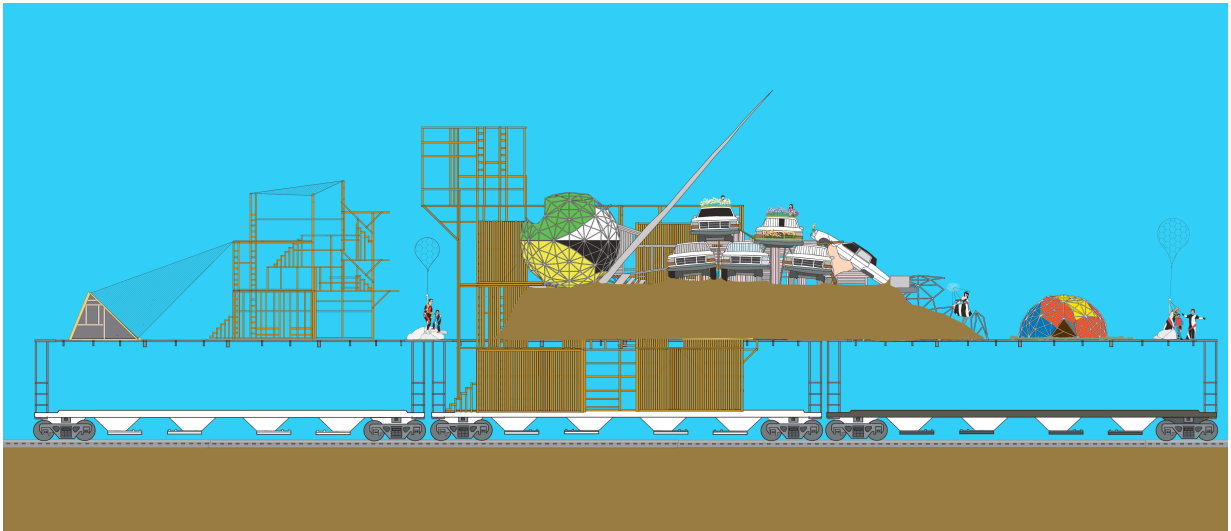


Figure 13: Tyler Brett, *The Odyssey Panorama*.

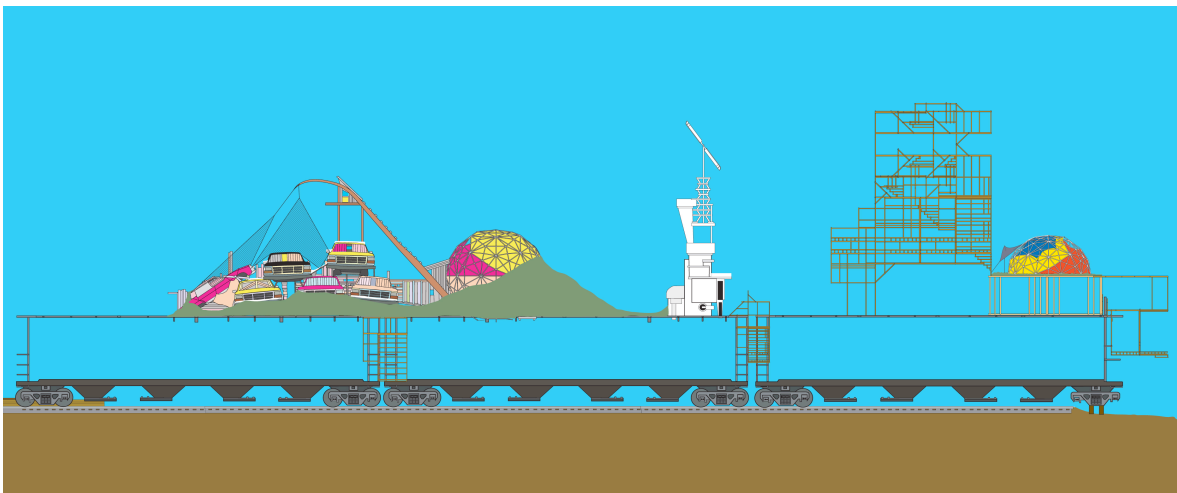


Figure 14: Tyler Brett, *The Odyssey Panorama*.

Notes

¹ Simon Sadler, *Archigram: Architecture Without Architecture*. (USA: MIT Press, 2005), 5.

² Ibid., 7.

³ Ibid., 8.

⁴ Ibid., 196.

⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁶ Ibid., 16

⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰ Robert Enright, "A Model Artist: Observations On Art and Play From Kim Adams." *Border Crossings* 18 no. 1, (Jan 1999): 17.

¹¹ Transport For London. "Thin Cities: 100 years of the Piccadilly Line. Nils Norman, Above Ground." Transport for London
<http://thincities.tfl.gov.uk/projects/artist.php?id=12TFL P1>.

¹² Ibid., 1.

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